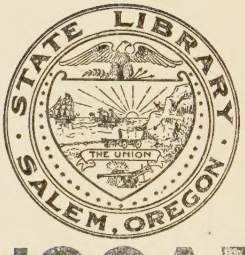
INDIAN EARTH

Witter Bynner



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Indian Earth

Other Books by Witter Bynner

THE BELOVED STRANGER

A CANTICLE OF PAN

A BOOK OF PLAYS

THE NEW WORLD

YOUNG HARVARD

CARAVAN

CAKE

GRENSTONE POEMS

THE JADE MOUNTAIN

A Chinese Anthology of the T'ang Dynasty
618-906
From the texts of Kiang Kang-Hu

INDIAN EARTH

Witter Bynner

New York
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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

WITTER BYNNER

was born in Brooklyn in 1881. In 1902 he received his A.B. degree from Harvard and for the next four years he was an associate editor of McClure's Magazine. In 1907, "Young Harvard" appeared and two years later, "Kit," a one-act play was produced. He delivered at Harvard in 1911 the Phi Beta Kappa poem, "An Immigrant," and in 1912 "His Father's House," a three-act play was produced in California, to be followed a year later by the publication of the now famous one-act play, "Tiger," and "The New World," his 1913 Harvard Phi Beta Kappa poem. There followed "The Little King"; in 1915, his English version of "Iphigenia in Tauris," written for Isadora Duncan; in 1917, "Anygirl" and "Grenstone Poems;" in 1919, "A Canticle of Praise" and "The Beloved Stranger," in 1920, "A Canticle of Pan." Since 1917 Mr. Bynner has passed much time in the Orient, particularly in China, where he has lived in Chinese fashion, close to the native life.

Mr. Bynner also has been long interested in the Indian tribes in the West, and makes his permanent home in Santa Fé, New Mexico.

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MANUFACTUI

To

D. H. Lawrence

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

The Winged Serpent

CHAPALA POEMS

(Old Mexico)

Harmonica 3

The Bats 5

Moonlight Rain 6

Folk-Song 7

Street Musicians 8

Montezuma 9

Another Sunset 10

To My Mother Concerning a Chapala Sunset 11

Market-Day 12

A Bird that Sings 13

A Weaver from Jocotepec 14

Band Concert 15

A Countryman 16

A Boatman 17

A Guitarist 18

Volcano 19

Men of Mescala 20

In Mescala 21
Dark Eyes 22
Lovers 23
A Beautiful Mexican 24
La Francesa 25
A Linnet 26
Dolphins 27
Sitting Alone in My Study Window by the Pepper-Tree 28
From Chapala to a San Franciscan 29
Worshippers 30
Crow's Feet 32
To a Disappointed Pilgrim 33
El Gallo 34
To a Friend Who Was Here Concerning Changes in Chapala 36
Conflict 37
Fiesta 38
Mexican Wind 39
There Had Been Songs 40
A Foreigner 41
The Hill by the Lake 42
The Cross on Tunapec 43
Indian Earth 44
The Storm-Dragon 46

Owls 47
A Moth 48
The Web 49
Tulé 50
Water-Hyacinths 51
Tunapec 52
Calendar 54
Dark Waters 55
Idols 56

PUEBLO DANCES

(New Mexico and Arizona)

A Dance for Christ 61
(San Felipe)
A Dance for Rain 63
(Cochiti)
A Buffalo Dance 66
(Santo Domingo)
Eagle Dance 72
(Tesuque)
Eagle Dance 73
(Walpi)
Snake Dance 74
(Hotevilla)
Shalako 76
(Zuni)

PROLOGUE

The Winged Serpent

THE WINGED SERPENT

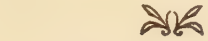
The eagle is of the air toward the sun,
And the rattlesnake is of the earth toward the sun;
And the mewing of the eagle is the sound of many people under the sun,
And the rattle of the snake is the sound of many people under the sun.
But where are the people who can make the sound of the winged serpent,
Clapping the air into thunder
And shaking lightning from his scales?
This is the bird of the wonder that prevails,
The serpent of the wonder that prevails;
This is the dream that lives in the mountains above the yellow people of the middle kingdom,
This is the dream that lives in the lake among the red people of the outer kingdom;
This is the heaver of earthquakes,
This is the dreamer of rain;
This is the earth in the air
And the air in the earth;
This is the winged terror in the hearts of men
Because a snake can be so high in the air
And a bird can be so low in the ground,
With a hiss of fire from the scaly girth
And a stir of rainbows through the feathered mane.
Pray to him well,
He will dart through your prayer,
Through the very heart and center of your prayer,

And out of the words of your mouth
He will scatter a mist that will reassemble in a great whit
cloud,
And out of the cloud will come rain.
Laugh for him well,
And he will dart through your laughter,
Dashing it into splinters and spars of light
To be reassembled in the sun.
Die for him well,
And out of your death he will make darkness.
And if you have lived for him,
He will add the breath, that you have sung with,
To the everlasting wind of his plumes.

CHAPALA POEMS

(Old Mexico)

HARMONICA



1

If there seem to be music in the Chapala night,
Make sure of it, although it be no more
Than a mouth-organ. Aware of it under the moon,
We went two ways that were wrong, and then the one
that was right
Between roofs that form a staircase up the hill.
And there, in the rocky shadow before the lane
Narrows among grass-houses, we found our man
Whitely unblanketed, breathing his tunes.

2

A fragment of darkness, moving into the moonlight
From a doorway, spoke and became a listener.
Slowly we knew that there were several others—
An aged woman and a water-boy.
Pedro had stopped, afraid that we were soldiers,
He had hidden his crescent knife under a stone;
But now he said, with a smile for all his comrades:
"The night is beautiful. I will play to the stars."

3

Are stars concerned with a song about a suitor
Who, wishing a mother to think that he can notice
The bars of a certain window and not be disturbed,

Nibbles a piece of bread whenever he passes?—
Or a song about a husband recommending
That the mother of his wife be buried differently
From other people—by the favour of God,
Face down forever and her mouth at peace?

4

Do the stars prefer verses of swallow and dove?—
Or rapid dances played with such a swing
That when Pedro's brother, Pablo, came from bed
And danced over cobbles with his wakened feet,
Pedro himself put up his other hand
To drop his hat on the ground and danced around it
And sent a rhythm from his top to his toes
With doubly driven breath and forgot the stars?

5

After an interval, Jesus inquired,
"Are moneyed people, below us in the town,
As happy as we Indians on the hill?"
Rafael shrugged with his hands; but Pedro played
A final melody: he tipped his head
Back on his shoulders, even with the sky,
Held his harmonica cupped in his hand
And was lighted from brow to thumb, as mountains are.

THE BATS

1

In the June twilight, we looked without knowing why
At the peaked gable of a corner house;
And while we looked, a hundred bats flew out
From the patterned eaves over the beach and the lake;
And as soon as they had wavered high out of sight,
Came other hundreds at eight intervals:
Like black leaves dropping and gathered up again
In their own wind and blown to the setting sun.

2

After the firm birds of water and the bright birds of trees,
After the transparent golden air of day,
It is magical to see a host of shadows
Trembling upward over the mountain-top,
Or hovering past a balconied window at midnight
And flaking singly toward a mottled moon.
Even the bats are beautiful in Chapala
Where shadows leave the breast and fly away.

MOONLIGHT RAIN

Once in Chapala there was a moon and music;
And before the clouds blew nearer to the moon
Guitar and harp and violins and voices
Were singing on the beach, before the rain
Under the moonlight, singing of a swallow,
And still were singing after the lake-rain fell,
Singing of a little deer who comes down from the moun-
tain
Only to places that are very quiet.

WHEN a poor man takes but a drink or two,
"How drunk he is," says everyone,
But when a rich man takes too much,
Everyone cries, "How gay he is!"
Under a tree a peacock once
Would sleep and keep his feathers dry,
But the tree has withered and been cut down
And the peacock sleeps like the rest of us.

STREET MUSICIANS

SERENELY the men of music play and sing,
Oftentimes to a wave that likewise breaks
In music, their faces remaining aloof, poised
As a violin, contained as the strings of a harp.
When tomatoes have been planted, Carlos comes,
And when he sings or when he speaks, conjures
Such gentle kingliness that his guitar
Is the feathered mantle of Montezuma, gleaming.

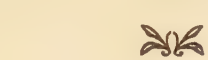
MONTEZUMA

THE sunset was a crown of spiked flame—
"Come, put me on, if you can!" and no one could.
Even the mountain turned its head aside
From coronation, wore but an ashen summit.
Suddenly Montezuma rose again,
Forgot that his young heart was full of dust
And setting on his brow the level turquoise,
Walked with flamingo feathers down the world.

ANOTHER SUNSET

Red caves of light rise from the western range,
From the southern mountain a smoky cone of fire,
And under all the cloudy caves and cones
The lake is throbbing from its earthen heart.
I am alone here among these dark-eyed people.
Yet who is alone while lips and eyes can smile?
Where is a hiding-place from happiness?
Shadowy caves dissolve and leave a star.

TO MY MOTHER
CONCERNING A CHAPALA SUNSET



To you, at evening, I exclaim aloud—
Because you never see the range of light
That lives along Chapala mountain-tops
With massive interchange of sun and moon.
And yet, before I was born, you had often watched,
On mountain-clouds as beautiful as these,
Changes of light that I shall never see
In this confused and separating world.

1

On Saturdays they steer with the west wind
From the adobe houses of San Luis,
From Jocotepec, Tuzcueca, Tizapan,
Bringing broad-woven hats, leafy baskets of cheese,
Oranges, limes, zarapes and earthenware.
And often under their waxing waning sails,
To cheer Chapala, comes a bearded singer
As blind as Homer once, in other towns.

2

A sail crumples under the setting sun;
And barefoot fellows, leaning their weight on poles,
Walk half the way from lofty prow to stern
And hurry back again till, near the beach,
Wading the waves with copper thighs, dragging
The loosened rudder, they heave it up the sand
For double anchorage; then, on their shoulders,
They bring ashore their women and their wares.

A BIRD THAT SINGS

Unless we remain children, we grow too old.
So buy a toy with me in the market-place,
A bird painted singing on a dish of clay,
Or a water-bottle to hang on a firefly,
Or a basket for a beetle to market with.
What would a market be like, unless we were children
Prizing above all else a bird that sings
Within this dish of clay, this human breast?

1

SUNDAYS he comes to me with new zarapes
Woven especial ways to please us both:
The Indian key and many-coloured flowers
And lines called rays and stars called little doves.
I order a design; he tells me yes
And looking down across his meager beard,
Foresees a good zarape. Other times
I order a design; he tells me no.

2

Since the weavers of Jocotepec are masters in Jalisco
And no weaver in Jocotepec the master of mine,
I watched the zarapes of strangers who came to the plaza
For the Sunday evening processions round the band;
And I showed him once, on a stranger, a tattered blanket
Patterned no better than his but better blent—
Only to find it had taken three weavers to weave it:
My weaver first and then the sun and rain.

BAND CONCERT

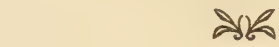
CONCENTRIC round the plaza, round the band,
Girls are circling one way, boys the other.
From the outer line a boy's hand reaches and leaves
A head in the girls' line capped with his confetti
And a heart in the girls' line kindling to his heart.
Street-flares will darken when the night-bell rings
But first will have brightened on a sidelong eye. . . .
Churches are not the only way to heaven.

Swinging a blanket over his left shoulder,
Wearing its bright-coloured heart upon his sleeve,
He takes up his bed and walks. It serves him well
For warmth at night on his mat, or in the evening
Against a wind that pours along the lake.
Even at noon it hangs from his neck to his ankle,
Unneeded in the sun except as a king
Always has need to be wearing majesty.

A BOATMAN

In a pool of shadow floating cool on the sand,
As if for a fish to lean in motionless,
The boatman lies asleep, hands under head,
Dreaming of death; and close to him as a weed
Is to a fish, his hat is sleeping too. . . .
How intimate he is with the good earth,
As if, long buried, he were still alive
Among the many other mounds of sand.

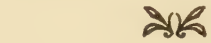
A GUITARIST



Passing the guavas and the pomegranates
And the jointed rushes taller than two men,
We held our picnic in a mango grove
Where oval fruit mellowed in rooted angles.
We feasted on pork and corn. Quick with tequila,
We danced and sang to harp, violin, guitar.
But the blind guitarist was centuries back in Asia,
With a moon in his hand and with mango-lidded eyes.

VOLCANO

ONCE were these mountains a vast volcano-rim?
Are these September clouds, that hang the peaks
With rain and in canyons drift downward like snow,
All that remain of the ancient smoking earth?
Look, sometime in the plaza, how eyes that were laughing
With sun go suddenly hot with lava, like Garifo's—
Who has had to leave Chapala for a while
Because there was too much fire in his knife.



For five years, piloted by ancient stars,
You carried corn at night to the defenders
Of your small island, while the Spaniards waited,
Circling in anger. Later with pirate sails,
You emptied many a boat of its merchandise.
And then a few of you, unmassacred,
Bore sons whose children's children find old stones
To hurl at trespassers on Indian land.

IN MESCALA

ABOVE a floating edge of hyacinths,
Lantanas and zinnias interrupt the streets;
Weeds hung with blossom crowd to the roofless church
Where priests from Spain built better than their bones;
And in the tumbled plaza, two old sages
With Asian faces and with Indian hats
Play—on a drum and a morning-glory pipe—
A jolly requiem for the Spanish dead.

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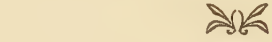
DARK EYES

WHAT are they waiting for, his humid eyes?
For wine, women and song, laughter and sleep.
. . . After enough of business in the morning
To be forgotten in the afternoon,
He will bid the evening and a little boy
Carry a message to a certain house,
Begging for leniency. And by-and-by
Lightning will flame from cloudy breast to breast.

From somewhere over the houses, through the silence,
Through the late night, come windy ripples of music.
There's a lighted cigarette-end in the black street,
Moving beside the music he has brought her.
Behind a shuttered window, there's a girl
Smiling into her pillow. And now by her hand
There's a candle lighted and put out again.
And the shadow of a bird leaves its perch for a smaller twig.

A BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN



THERE where she sips her wine, her copper brow
Is itself the sunset. Her eyes are lifted now,
Her eyes are evening-stars. I have seen many
Chapala sunsets—but never before have I seen one
Come down from the mountain to be a beautiful woman,
To shadow a table with a dusk of light
From a bare arm and then, alas, to rise
And turn and go, leaving a sudden darkness.

LA FRANCESA

Selling her candies at a corner booth
To spend the profit on prisoners in jail,
The little old Frenchwoman would watch the beach
From under the white halo of her hair.
She told me once, "I have three ages, different:
My hair, they are white, they are one hundred years;
My body, it is fifty-six; but my heart
Only fifteen, because never have I loved."

A LINNET

On the September road from Guadalajara,
Over corn-flower and water-lily, cosmos and marigold
The birds and yellow butterflies go reeling,
And even a man who owns a motor-car
Has time to see the entire world concentered
In the poise and flight and absence of a linnet;
Even the mind of a motorist can taper
To the point of a brush in ancient Chinese fingers.

DOLPHINS

1

A row-boat called the Dolphin should have nosed
Across high waves; but this one, never departing,
Was always moored a swimming-length from shore,
Just far enough away from troubled eyes
So that we bared ourselves to the calm sun
And lay by the hour basking; now and then
Diving for freshness, and pelting one another
With hairy roots of water-hyacinth.

2

There were sometimes two of us and sometimes three,
Our bodies dolphin-polished by the sun;
And one day seven of us faced, in the boat,
Billows of life, of art, of war, of love,
But none too high to pierce with happy fins:
We were seven dolphins, riding as dolphins should
Whatever tidal wave might plague the world
And lift a dolphin nearer to the sun.

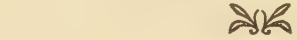
SITTING ALONE IN MY STUDY WINDOW BY THE PEPPER-TREE

A PEPPER-TREE hangs and swings and hides the lake,
And I hear the edging waves and the laughter of children.
How can there be no sudden poems in my heart,
Under the pepper-tree by my cool southern window?
We sat here together yesterday, writing poems.
You were in the yellow chair, I in the green chair.
And today I can think of nothing to say but this:
When I look up, the yellow chair is empty.

FROM CHAPALA TO A SAN FRANCISCAN

THERE came no radiance from the setting sun
But only grayness, till it was surely night.
Then where the sun had darkened on the mountain
Above the lake, a great flush opened and closed.
Now layers of cloud gather against the moon.
And yet the moonlight on this Aztec hill
So binds the world that I can almost see
Mount Tamalpais and the Golden Gate.

WORSHIPPERS



1

THROUGH the door of the double-spired village church
That looms on the lake-edge, I was watching once
A score of worshippers and among them three:
Two women together and one man alone,
Who knelt long minutes with their arms out-held
As on three crosses. Mantillas hid the women;
But the man's sombrero lay on the floor like a halo
Replaced awhile by an unseen crown of thorns.

2

Feeling a smile beside me, I found a man there
For whom caps and science had ousted sombreros and haloes.
"Poor people," he said, "poor ignorant people," he said,
"Fooled and befuddled by all these Christian fables!
Come to my house Sunday night. The free-thinkers meet there.
We have over fifteen in the village, and that's pretty good.
One of our men is a medium, in touch with the dead.
Voltaire came and talked to us last time for over an hour."

3

We wandered together on the eastward walk
Beside the lake. "Where is that crescent of land,"
I said, "that used to belong here to the sunset,
With figures of women beautiful in the evening
Washing their clothes in the lake?" "It spoiled the lake-
front,"
He answered, "so they dredged it away." I bowed.
"And that ancient tree the newsboys used to play in?"
"It spoiled the view," he answered. I bowed again.

4

"Voltaire be with you," I told him. He thanked me for
that
And left me to walk back alone where the tree had been.
It had stood like a blackened rainbow, an arch gnarling
As perfect against the lake as a tree in Japan.
I bared my head and paused above its roots—
And still with my hat off, went to the edge of the water
Where land had curled out once as beautiful
As ever the moon under the feet of the Virgin.

CROW'S FEET

If we are older then after the years, if our cronies look
For crow's feet at the corners of our eyes,
Shall we bend our temples toward the crooked shade
And be ashamed, or laugh untroubled and uplift
A brow for the bird of mirth to tread upon?
Hear how he caws through heaven, his black wings
And the hugging of his legs edged with azure.
If there were no ripeness here, would he alight?

TO A DISAPPOINTED PILGRIM

You came with suitcase and with manuscripts
And spread your luggage in a spacious room.
You leaned on a railing over a pepper-tree,
Over corn-stalks and banana-plants taller than yourself.
You faced a mountain-range holding a lake;
But in all the great homes of cloud you had nowhere to go,
Nowhere to rest your discontented heart,
Loving that heart too well to set it free.

THEY waited, sleeping on the plaza benches,
Until we woke them to the moon at midnight;
And then between the whitened walls they followed,
Playing and singing. A violinist joined them,
Holding his violin with hands of air.
From one of the houses came a clarinet,
And down from the moon a dozen blanketed figures.
And we danced folk-dances in the market-place.

2

With half the night before us and no more bottles,
We knocked at several doors, naming them brother,
And then at a shuttered window and called it darling.
We saw the shutters come open with the light of a candle. . . .
Shakes of the head to our entreaty, no relenting,
Someone asleep there in the room behind her. . . .
Eyes in the moonlight, lips of silent laughter,
And at last through the window a bottle of pomegranate wine.

3

Later she came to the market and opened a booth
Under the stars; and fanning a charcoal fire
To heat the water for our cinnamon-tea,

She poured into every bowl its little measure
Of alcohol and gave new draughts of life
To the driver of the bus, a shoemaker,
Seven musicians, three soldiers with their guns,
A boot-black and a boatman and ourselves.

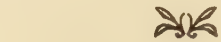
4

As soon as the cinnamon-tea had played its part,
We carried the blacksmith harpist to his bed;
And making sure that he was sound asleep,
We sat at ease upon the cobblestones
And sang of love under his daughter's window.
Then by the lake we sang our final songs,
Good-night to the moon, good-morning to the sun,
And plead our friendship to the point of tears.

5

From my western balcony-window, I watched the light
Deepen under solid leaves along the hill,
And under ledges I had never seen
On the mountain-range, and sharpen the sides of boats.
. . . And so it had been under my ribs with music
And with wine, a lovely deepening of the light
A body carries on its own small hill:
I laughed aloud, joining bright earth with earth.

TO A FRIEND WHO WAS HERE CONCERNING CHANGES IN CHAPALA



Two trees have been cut in the plaza. How soon, old
friend,
Will Chapala change and change without our knowing?
. . . The corn, no bigger than a bird when you left,
Has risen almost twice as high as you,
And where there was only sand there's a tangle now
Of flowering green. Even the lake has shifted,
Has moved with the world across the setting sun.
And the beggar-boy uses a new smile.

CONFLICT

THE day we crossed the lake, the day that death
Confused the sun in San Luis Soyatlan
With a sudden conflict in the afternoon
Between the spark of rifles and of life,
We left three horsemen who had sat erect
A moment since—and we faced over the water
The everlasting bubble of the earth,
Its hollow filled with a rainbow breath of mountains.

FIESTA

The flag of Mexico flew on the jail
In the noisy air of Independence Day,
And girls of the town feasted the prisoners. . . .
"A patriot should never commit a crime—"
But someone whispered that the prisoner-spokesman
(Whose grizzled moustache confined a mouth as sober
As the plaza was with all cantinas closed)
Had killed at intervals eleven men.

A MEXICAN WIND

Out of nowhere it came and tipped the lake at our
boat,
Darkening all around us like a doom,
So that we put for shore and climbed, through flowers,
A hill of trees where a thatch-roof shed the rain.
We crawled inside. We wondered about scorpions.
A burro made room and wondered about us,
Whose lips could laugh and sing a Mexican song
And yet whose hearts were somehow very strange.

THERE HAD BEEN SONGS

In that northern country overrun with gringos,
That country strong and terrible with strangers,
Only a few Indians lost away in the desert
Are left as intimates of the sun and rain.
. . . In Chapala there had been white-flowing calzones,
for legs
To loaf in, and wide-woven sandals at ease with the
earth,
And there had been songs to live with—till machinery
Bore down from the north, and overalls and shoes.

CHAPALA still remembers the foreigner
Who came with a pale red beard and pale blue eyes
And a pale white skin that covered a dark soul;
They remember the night when he thought he saw a hand
Reach through a broken window and fumble at a lock;
They remember a tree on the beach where he used to sit
And ask the burros questions about peace;
They remember him walking, walking away from something.

THERE are hooks and spines, thorns beyond name and number,
Every kind of cactus on that hill.
I can see clearly cactus from my window,
Cylinders, fingers, columns, lobes; and still
I lean with every twilight on my railing
And wish that I might touch and pet and pat
And stroke and hold alive the glossy hillside:
The lake is moving like the tail of a cat.

THE CROSS ON TUNAPEC

These cobbles toward the foot of Tunapec
Lead from Chapala to a pyramid.
Whether this hill was shaped for the sun and moon
By Aztec builders, or the village came
And knelt by a natural altar-stone,
There are cactus for the foot now, brambles for the hand,
And on the top the black and bloody knife
Is a crucifixion hung with paper flowers.

1

THEY think they have won you to their foreign god.
They put you in their churches. On your necks
They hang their little symbols of remorse.
And all the while your hearts go up a hill
To other priests of whom you never speak
In your confessional. You sin your sins,
Your little sins, and weep. But oh, the sin
Of tearing your heart out to the perfect sun!

2

It is the earth itself that hems you round
Against intruders alien to the earth,
That brings you heaven under a shadowy tree,
Curves heaven to your arm and lets you lie
Close to its living thorn. The crown is yours,
Not theirs. You know the one divinity,
The only death, the offering of the heart
To the cruel earth, the love, the consummation.

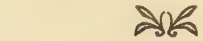
3

Your houses are made of it. They come and go,
Arise from it and crumble back to it.
In your old graves your intimate images
Are made of it, mother and sire and son,

Infant in arms, each with his earthen face.
Anyone who has taken once a handful
Of Indian earth out from among your bones
Feels in his hand the fusing of your will.

4

No need of priests with knives for trespassers.
Let come who may with an estranging hand,
Let touch who will this earth so deeply yours,
None of it ever goes away from you.
Your gods are here, deeper than any spade;
And when you lie on the earth under the sun,
They whisper up to you ancestral spells
From your own roots, to rot these foreign hearts.

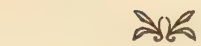


1

A WATER-SNAKE trailing lily-bulbs,
Or a rattler slowly coiling on Tunapec. . . .
But where is the winged serpent all the while?
Has he coiled his spirit away on pyramids? . . .
With the oxen and burros we hide our frightened eyes.
We have seen him coming through a gap of hills,
Throwing a horseman down, overturning a boat,
His horizontal plumage stiff with rain.

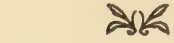
2

He huddles us aside out of his way,
He breathes on us, he drowns us with his breath,
He burns our eyes with his, he claps his wings
Over our heads. Longer than a mountain,
He passes and passes, miles of him in the wind.
And afterwards the dragging of his tail
Has slashed the roadway to a yellow froth
And spun the meadows whirling at their trees.



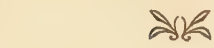
How can it be a train? It must have been an owl
Whistling his stations. I remember the story
That Juan, the ranchero, told me about owls.
There had been no owls at his farm, until one night
On every moonlit pole of a scaffolding
Erected to repair the family chapel
An owl had perched, and early in the dawn
They all had flown away with his father's soul.

A MOTH



UNDER a mosquito-bar I lie and smoke,
Content with an ember, and watch a moth outside
Choosing the flame of a candle. He darts and darts,
Forever untaught by the shock against his wings.
And then, too frayed for flight, he trembles downward,
Till only his eyes can long for the godly flame.
Have I not tried a thousand times, myself,
To pierce the fiery quick of being dead?

THE WEB



I AM caught in an iridescent spider-web,
One end of it attached to a pepper-tree
And the other to a weed on Tunapec.
Why should I break the pattern of the world?
Better to swing, so delicately caught,
Than to have my eyes put out in hollow flame.
I flutter my wings a while and then subside,
Till a shadow shall find me in the evening wind.

TULÉ

WHAT is this reed that grows tall in the river-bed?
They make their plaited mats of it to lie on,
They gather it from the river-edge and make mats of it
And soften their earthen floors with it to lie on. . . .
Yesterday noon I saw the mat I needed,
Six feet of reeds torn loose from the river-bed,
A mat that I might peacefully have lain on,
Go blowing down the lake before the wind.

WATER-HYACINTHS

1

WHAT is so permanent as a first love,
Except the impermanence of later loves?
. . . I sit in a rowboat, watching the hyacinths
Float down the lake and thinking about people,
How they insinuate and change and vanish,
How everyone leaves everyone alone,
How even the look of a beloved child
Is lesser solace than a mountain-rim.

2

Have I a grievance then against my friends,
Against my lovers? Is love so unavailing,
That here in a rowboat I shrug my naked shoulder
And watch the hyacinth go down the lake?
Do words that were light as air on living lips
Last longer when they crumble underground?
And is the soul an insecurer thing,
Less intimate, than the connecting earth?

TUNAPEC

1

THE better to keep my balance, in a world
Broken and tipped into these fragments of distance,
And to hold the warmness of so many hands
That a moment's interval might change and chill,
I watch from the poising top of Tunapec,
From the stones of a temple no one remembers now,
Lovers remembered climbing up a hill
And lovers forgotten drifting down again.

2

How could I know the wisdom of a world
That blows its withered leaves down from the air
They gleamed in once and gathers their strength again
upward
In the sap of earth, if I set my fervid heart
On a leaf unmoved by any wind of change,
If I wanted still that spring when first I loved?
No leaves that have ever fallen anywhere
Are anywhere but here, heaping the trees.

3

I watch from the poising top of Tunapec,
From the stones of a temple no one remembers now
Lovers remembered climbing up a hill,

Bringing me friends again from every land
That ever touched my heart. They all have come
Into this quiet port of evening earth;
And down to the lake, all the alighting mountains
Hover and settle like a single bird.

CALENDAR

WHY should I know or care what month it is?
An Aztec calendar was made long since.
What year was it? What century? What matter?
A piece of stone became symmetrical.
If I watch the time, some of my friends will die,
If I watch the time, I shall surely die myself.
Let me, then, gather all my friends about me
And carve an endless moment out of stone.

1

THE sound of lake-waves washes around my bed
A dream of rounded blocks, of masonry
Darkened with waters and with living green.
Oh, once I was a lover bewildered by earth,
Walking and stumbling from an accursed house
Where a body lay dead. Now I myself am lying
Enchanted horizontal in a tower
Far away, safe between the sea and moon.

2

What though there be no tallness for my tower
But the height of an earthen room, I lie at peace.
What though the moon, from bathing in the lake,
Lean naked on the edge of my balcony,
What though the moon be drying her bright hair
And curving the beautiful malice of her lips,
What though she come to my bed with her curved knife—
I lie unhurt among Chapalan hills.

1

They must have buried him away from the lake
Lest he be discontented with his grave
And forsaking the image at his ear, rise up
And sail. No edge of water was visible
From where he had lain so many hundred years
That every bone was fibrous like old wood,
And his moony skull came crumbling in my hand
When I removed the god that whispered there.

2

Within that skull hate had once eaten, and love
Had spun its intricate iridescent web,
And then the worms and the wet earth had worn
Both love and hate down to the marrow-bone.
Fingers that mingle now with yellow roots
And indeterminably feed the world
May once have baked the fingers of this god
That, still intact, grope after human clay.

3

What surer god have I ever seen than this
Which I deliver from an earthen womb,
This idol made of clay, made of man,
This fantasy, this mute insensate whim

Enduring still beside its maker's dust?
These are the open eyes, the lips that speak
Wonderful things, this is the living thought
That make the man alive and alive again.

4

Lie close to me, my poem, and comfort me,
Console me with substance lovelier than mine,
Breathe me alive a thousand years from now,
Whisper—beside that rim of an empty moon,
Under the earth, the moon I thought with once—
That once to have thought, once to have used the earth,
Is to have made a god more durable
Than flesh and bone. Lie close to me, my poem.

PUEBLO DANCES

(New Mexico and Arizona)

A DANCE FOR CHRIST

(San Felipe)

The priest was waiting, but the church was bare.
The altar waited and the candle-flare
And paper flowers and a wooden brother.
We stood in the cold and looked at one another.
"Come," said an Indian to the foreign priest,
"Say mass and we'll go to bed," without in the least
Setting ahead the mind of that strange man.
It was not at midnight that the mass began
But at four o'clock on the morning of Christmas day.
"There'll be more audience," was all he would say.
A few at a time, they assembled out of their beds
With blankets wound around their quiet heads;
And bending one by one on the cold stone,
The women waited, or an old man knelt alone.
Four children in the pulpit, as birds might perch,
Patiently watched in the nocturnal church.
At last in the gallery a water-bird,
A whistle dipped in a cup, warbled and stirred
The standers-by and a violin-string sufficed
To tell them simply of the birth of Christ.
And so a child was born and in the breath
Of Roman words was crucified to death—
And an Indian child in the pulpit, standing asleep,
Fell down the steps but was allowed to creep

Softly aloft again, to watch the birth
Alike of Christian and of pagan earth.
Then after the sermon and the giving of bread
In remembrance of one who was given a stone instead,
A sudden savage sound broke through the door.
There fell a thud of dancing on the floor;
And feathered figures in the candle-light
Brought their own festival out of the night.
They wove their native steps wanton and wild
Before the cradle of a foreign child,
They blessed with ardors of bloodshed and of war
The foreign child whom they were dancing for,
They served and loved and slew with all their might
The infant Jesus on that naked night,
And then were gone—leaving a cross to save
Belated Christians in an empty nave.

A DANCE FOR RAIN

(Cochiti)

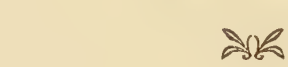
You may never see rain, unless you see
A dance for rain at Cochiti,
Never hear thunder in the air
Unless you hear the thunder there,
Nor know the lightning in the sky
If there's no pole to know it by.
They dipped the pole just as I came,
And I can never be the same
Since those feathers gave my brow
The touch of wind that's on it now,
Bringing over the arid lands
Butterfly gestures from Hopi hands
And holding me, till earth shall fail,
As close to earth as a fox's tail.
I saw them, naked, dance in line
Before the candles of a leafy shrine:
Before a saint in a Christian dress
I saw them dance their holiness,
I saw them reminding him all day long
That death is weak and life is strong
And urging the fertile earth to yield
Seed from the loin and seed from the field.
A feather in the hair and a shell at the throat
Were lifting and falling with every note

Of the chorus-voices and the drum,
Calling for the rain to come.
A fox on the back, and shaken on the thigh
Rain-cloth woven from the sky,
And under the knee a turtle-rattle
Clacking with the toes of sheep and cattle—
These were the men, their bodies painted
Earthen, with a white rain slanted;
These were the men, a windy line,
Their elbows green with a growth of pine.
And in among them, close and slow,
Women moved, the way things grow,
With a mesa-tablet on the head
And a little grassy creeping tread
And with sprays of pine moved back and forth,
While the dance of the men blew from the north,
Blew from the south and east and west
Over the field and over the breast.
And the heart was beating in the drum,
Beating for the rain to come.
    Dead men out of earlier lives,
Leaving their graves, leaving their wives,
Were partly flesh and partly clay,
And their heads were corn that was dry and gray.
They were ghosts of men and once again
They were dancing like a ghost of rain;
For the spirits of men, the more they eat,
Have happier hands and lighter feet,
And the better they dance the better they know
How to make corn and children grow.
    And so in Cochiti that day,

They slowly put the sun away
And they made a cloud and they made it break
And they made it rain for the children's sake.
And they never stopped the song or the drum
Pounding for the rain to come.
    The rain made many suns to shine,
Golden bodies in a line
With leaping feather and swaying pine.
And the brighter the bodies, the brighter the rain
Where thunder heaped it on the plain.
Arroyos had been empty, dry,
But now were running with the sky;
And the dancers' feet were in a lake,
Dancing for the people's sake.
And the hands of a ghost had made a cup
For scooping handfuls of water up;
And he poured it into a ghostly throat,
And he leaped and waved with every note
Of the dancers' feet and the songs of the drum
That had called the rain and made it come.
    For this was not a god of wood,
This was a god whose touch was good,
You could lie down in him and roll
And wet your body and wet your soul;
For this was not a god in a book,
This was a god that you tasted and took
Into a cup that you made with your hands,
Into your children and into your lands—
This was a god that you could see,
Rain, rain, in Cochiti!

A BUFFALO DANCE

(Santo Domingo)



Dawn came—
Not yet before us, where the sun was,
But behind us on a snow-peak.

Before us were the desert-hills,
All the barer for being spotted with pinyons;
And on the ridge,
Clustered black against the cold sky,
Were figures too still to be men.

Behind us, at the open edge of the plaza,
Stood the blanketed singers and drummers:
A thick crescent they were, curving toward a star.
And the star-man was taller than the moon-men,
And taller than he was the staff
Which he raised and lowered in the rhythm of the song
With a shaking of its top-knot of buffalo-toes.

And then the figures on the hill,
Too still until now to be men,
Ran to and fro, criss-crossing the little canyons,
And changed into men
And changed into boys, into children,
And they came down the brown hill,

With rests for renewal,
Two buffaloes,
Four deer,
Two elks,
Two antelopes.

And round us,
At a distance from the waiting chorus
Whose song gave welcome to the sun
And to the godly animals,
Were men and women and children of the pueblo;
And a few of them sat on the walls of old roofless houses,
And most of them wore their blankets hooding their heads from the chill;
And all of them were watching and were silent,
Except the chorus
Which was earth itself
With a song
That followed
The rising and the falling of the hills.

Two buffaloes,
Bare-bodied,
High-maned;
A woman,
Broad-bosomed,
But moving like a small bird;
Four deer,
White-coated,
With white fluff on their antlers
And white lace on their legs

And with brightly embroidered kilts of old meaning;
Two antelopes
Yellow,
With white chests;
Two elks
With straight horns, green-pronged, down their shoulders:
They entered the plaza.

And the faces of the men,
Being black,
Were no longer the faces of men
But were lost in the godly presences
Of two buffaloes, four deer, two elks and two antelopes.

And now, for the dance, there was a hunter,
With eagle-feathers hung from head to ankle
And with a swinging bow and arrow.

And they danced the sun up
And carried it on their shoulders
Into the kiva,
Where it should join council with gods and men.

And soon they were back again, to dance,
Back with the sun in the plaza.

The chorus,
Darkly sculptural at dawn,
Was vivid now as a mesa topped with plumes:
Closely curved rows of brightness,

With war-bonnets, with bows and guns,
With slashes and dots and angles of red and yellow
On their heightened faces
And with sprays of evergreen, to sing by, in their hands.

And then came another hunter,
Naked, slim and black,
With a small sharp helmet of black,
And he circled the dance,
Nervous, deliberate,
With his bow and arrow toward the godly animals.

Circling, foraging, pacing, pausing,
Scenting, shifting, crouching, speeding,
The buffaloes were buffaloes,
The deer were deer,
The elks were elks
And the antelopes were antelopes:
Mocassins, lean-muscled legs, rain-girdles, shells of turquoise,
Yet buffaloes, deer and elks and antelopes.

How could a short stick, held in two hands
And planted forward from a leaning back,
Turn into two legs of an antelope?
How could a short stick planted forward
Turn into two legs of an elk?
How could a short stick and the turn of a man's head
Become the sidelong poise of a listening deer?

Only the gods can tell us,
Only the gods who danced that day,

The gods who suddenly flung the beauty of animals
And the beauty of men
Into one quick rainfall rhythm of mocassins:

A steady fall, a broken fall, a fall blown circle-wise:

The buffaloes in the center;
With the woman,
Who swayed between and about them like a smooth and
friendly wind;
And then the four deer, staffs in a row, feet behind them
beating;
And the two antelopes, who had run with delicate hoofs
and dainty necks, now beating a foot-song as vital
as the rest;
And the elks, with their large-stepping circles;
And the powerful hunter, with his dips and his calls;
And the subtle hunter, doubtful, hopeful,
Weaving, watching
The circling, the foraging, the pacing, the pausing,
The scenting, the shifting, the crouching, the springing;
And then the quick beat again
Of the mocassins of godly men . . .

All day they followed,
Slow as the sun,
Swift as the rain,
Through centuries . . .

All day the strong voices
In unison . . .

Till at sunset,
The chorus,
Ending its song and its drums,
Made us wonder why the wind had died on the moment,
Why the heart had ceased from hearing itself,
Where the water was gone that had been heaving
through the ditches
And where the hoofs were gone from beating on the sky.

Dead, ceased, gone?
They?
Or we?

We saw, that night, the shadow,
Passing,
Of a hundred years upon a thousand years.

And a larger earth
Absolved us
Of ourselves
With a song of ourselves,
Of godly animals,
Of godly men
Who follow forever
The rising and the falling of the hills,
Deer, buffalo, elk, antelope, hunter,
Our thighs and ankles painted with the red adobe and
the white rain,
Our breast and forehead with the turquoise sky.

EAGLE DANCE

(Tesuque)

They paint us in our houses
To be pure in the plaza:
They know that we eat, sleep, laugh and are men;
But they paint us in our houses,
To be eagles.
And so we have taught our feet a worthy dance,
Worthy of the white down blowing on our chests,
Whirling in the sky on eagles.
And so our women think of us with beaks
That bite at the sun,
And our feathered bodies are become
Houses of women. . . .
But our feet are the feet of eagles,
Patterning free paths.

EAGLE DANCE

(Walpi)

SLOWLY we match our wings and tip them with stone,
Slowly we leave our nest, slowly we own
The azure world, slowly we weave our way in space,
Slowly we face
The sun.
And under our wings deers' ankles ripple and run
Through the sky
And in the mew of our beaks coyotes cry.
And our inner feathers are beaten by the upper airs
Full of men's prayers. . .
Slow and swift,
Swift and slow,
Downward we drift,
Upward we go—
Then down again, down to these Hopi hands
That crush our wings with rock and make demands
Through a dead eagle soaring to the sun
That their will be done. . . .
Ghostly we face the sun
And under our wings deers' ankles ripple and run
And in the mew of our beaks coyotes cry—
"I—I!"

SNAKE DANCE

(Hotevilla)

We are clean for them now, as naked-clean as they are,
We go out for them now and we meet them with our hands.
Bull-snakes, rattle-snakes, whip-snakes, we compare
Our cleanness with their cleanness. The sun stands
Witness, the moon stands witness. The dawn joins
Their scales with our flesh, the evening quiets their rattles.
We can feel their tails soothing along our loins
Like the feathers on our fathers after battles.
For their fathers were our fathers. We are brothers
Born of the earth and brothers in the sun;
And our destiny is only one another's,
However apart the races we have run.
Out of the earth we came, the sons of kings;
For the daughters of serpent-kings had offered grace
To our fathers and had formed us under their wings
To be worthy of light at last, body and face.
Out of the earth we came, into this open
Largeness of light, into this world we see
Lifted and laid along, broken and slopen,
This world that heaves toward heaven eternally.
We have found them, we have brought them, and we know them

As kin of us, because our fathers said:
As we have always shown them, you must show them
That kinship in the world is never dead.
Come then, O bull-snake, wake from your slow search
Across the desert. Here are your very kin.
Dart not away from us, whip-snake, but perch
Your head among your people moulded in
A greater shape yet touching the earth like you.
Leave off your rattling, rattle-snake, leave off
Your coiling, your venom. There is only dew
Under the starlight. Let our people cough
In the blowing sand and hide their faces, oh still
Receive them, know them, live with them in peace.
They want no rocks from you, none of your hill.
Uncoil again, lie on our arms, and cease
From the wars our fathers ceased from, be again
Close to your cousins, listen to our song.
Dance with us, kinsfolk, be with us as men
Descended from common ancestors, belong
To none but those who join yourselves and us.
Oh listen to the feathers that can weave
Only enchantment and to the words we sing,
The feet we touch the earth with. Help us believe
That our ancestors are still remembering.
Go back to them with sacred meal, go back
Down through the earth, oh be our messengers!
Tell them with reverence, tell them our lack;
Tell them we have no roots, but a sap that stirs
Forever unrooted upward to the sky.
But tell them also, tell them of our song
Downward from heaven, back where we belong.
Oh north, east, west and south, tell them we die!

SHALAKO

(Zuni)

YOUNG men and wives, you are bold,—
Your little new hands have made little new houses
of clay.
Newcomers, we are old
And we bless your boldness. In our far house this day
We have been told
Of your boldness; and we have arisen and come away
From the house the mountains have made us, where alone
With the mountains forever we abide in stone.
We have come down from the fastness of age, we have
come down
To bid you all, within your little town,
While time is yours to deal with, deal with it well.
Out of a marriage-bed
Rise ever the sublime
Dead,
Who shall dwell
Among the mountains and dispel
Mortality and time.
Lift up your beams, place them on walls of clay.
Make doors and enter them, make beds and lay
Your bodies down on them, make cradles, make
New beams and walls and doors and let them break
When break they must,

Beams, walls and doors and bodies, into dust.
Behold us maned with buffaloes' dead manes,
And beaked with beaks beyond man's memory
Of birds, and risen through endless suns and rains
To a great stature and final dignity.
Ahead of your boldness, we were bold.
We are the old
Who having time to deal with, dealt with it well
And are now to time and death inviolable.
Clothed in eternal buffaloes and birds,
We converse in mountain-peaks instead of words.
But we still have words for you. We bid you build
New houses that your ancestors have willed,
To hold new bodies adding to the dead.
These are our words. You have heard what we have said.

This book
is set in Garamond, a
modern rendering of the type
first cut in the sixteenth century by
Claude Garamont (1510-1561). He was a
pupil of Geofroy Tory and is believed to have
based his letters on the Venetian models, although he
introduced a number of important differences, and it is
to him that we owe the letter which we know as Old
Style. He gave to his letters a certain elegance and a
feeling of movement which won for their creator an
immediate reputation and the patronage of the French
King, Francis I.

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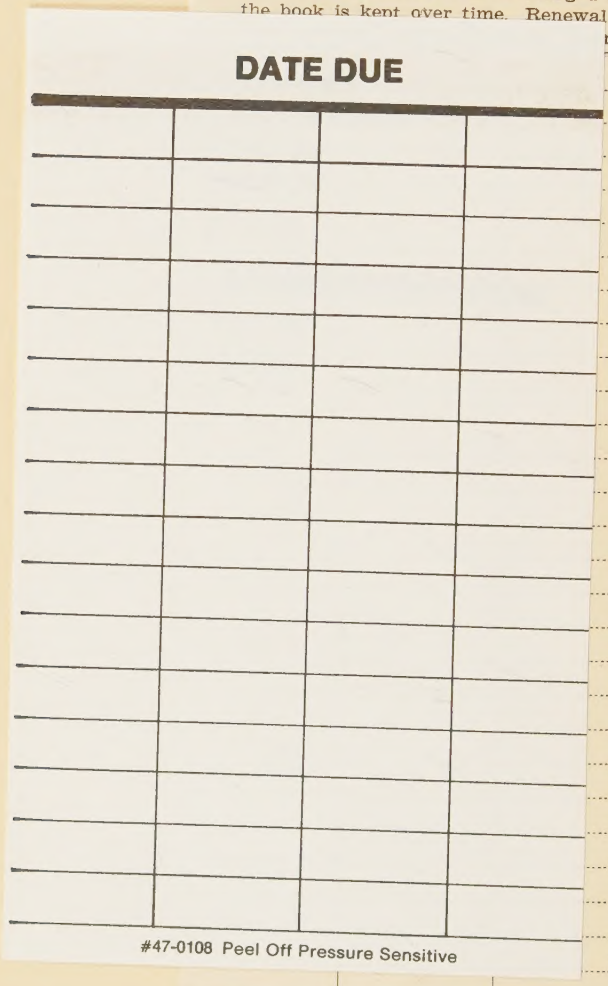

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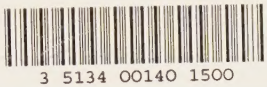

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